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# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

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**Thankfulness**

## "Beware the gratitude attitude and the Pharisee heresy."

I can still hear these words of my college religion professor as he warned us of the pitfalls to lives of grace.

The phrases have remained with me these many years, the **Pharisee heresy** being easier to grasp: a warning against seeing the law as a means to curry God's love and favor.

The **gratitude attitude** took me longer to understand; and some days, I admit, it still trips me up. "For are we not," I say to myself, "*supposed* to give thanks to our God for all that God has done for us?"

"Of course we are," comes the ready answer; but the key to it, as the faith-wise professor knew well, is how and when that gratitude issues from us human beings.

If we give thanks because we know we are *supposed* to, we have, indeed, already lost the battle—and, worse, the joy of thankfulness. True thanks comes *only after* God touches us,

grabs us with grace, embraces us with all-consuming love. When realization of that "amazing grace" hits, our thanks literally burst forth, spilling over into every corner of our lives. We are, in C. S. Lewis' words, "surprised by joy."

This issue seeks to remind us of God's gracious love and our response of thanks, freely given. Joan Bohlig's painting of vegetables on the front cover speaks lavishly of the bounty of God. So do the photographic poem-essays on pages 34-37. And does James Widmer, who sees in a widow's mite a reflection of the same lavishness.

**W**e learn of thankfulness through the eyes of women from rural Knoxville, Illinois (p. 1) and from South Africa (p. 3). Thanks-Giving Square in Dallas, Texas, helps us explore the role of thanks within a community (p. 1).

"The problem for atheists," Kathleen Melang notes (p. 4), "is that they don't have anyone to thank." In doing so she points to a truth we are pondering at this time of harvest Thanksgiving: that life in God's kingdom is not about *accumulation*, but *appreciation*.

*Nancy J. Stelling*

EDITOR

**ON THE COVER:** Oil painting by Joan Bohlig, Eagan, Minnesota.





### Cheers for two sisters

Thank you for another good issue of LWT [July/August]. As a cluster Mission: Action person, I found page 60 by Pamela Donovan helpful. The "Stories of Two Sisters" was very good, especially where Gwen Carr mentioned prayer as a "big part of those meetings." And that they began a Bible study group and didn't want to exclude themselves from "older" women! As an older woman, appreciate the energy younger ones bring. Cheers to Enid McGraw, too.

*Sarah Brake  
Pomeroy, Iowa*

### Paper dolls teach

Thank you! The cover of the June LWT was excellent. My little girl and I cut [the paper dolls] out and talked about how each "person" or "item" can be used by God. Only two days later she cut out of a women's magazine some more people and asked if they could be used by God too. It was a wonderful teaching tool!

*Susan Parker  
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

### Speaking of salvation

Regarding "Saving Body and Soul" (May), I will agree that the Salvation Army is a great charitable organization, but I find a great untruth in the statement "The Red Cross and

other outfits charged for everything." They do not. The Red Cross, too, is a great organization and goes where the need is.

*Pearl Berget  
Bismarck, North Dakota*

*The author, John Stevens Kerr, replies: The Red Cross usually charged soldiers for coffee and cigarettes during World War II, while the Salvation Army did not. The Red Cross provides many other free services.*

I have just finished reading the May LWT and am now struggling with very mixed feelings. The emphasis on salvation was timely in light of our recent celebration of Easter. But I was disturbed by the underlying message I got that was critical of any salvation message that did not fit the "Lutheran" standard. God is truly a God of mercy and grace and I praise him that in his deep wisdom he has recognized our individuality, and has therefore so ordained it that the salvation message can be and is presented in many different ways to meet all of our different needs and personalities.

*Manda Patterson  
Walker, Minnesota*

*(Letters continued on page 47)*

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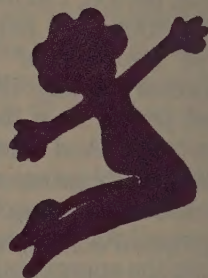
## FEATURES

### 4 GIVE US THIS DAY

**The Grand Giver**

*Karen Melang*

Giving thanks is not a virtue—it's one of our needs. **9 C A**



page

### 6 THANKING GOD FOR LIFE AND LAND

**A Conversation with Women of Grace Lutheran**

*Michel D. Clark*

Reflections on life, family, faith, and thankfulness for the family farm. **C**



page 13

### 10 A GIFT OF THANKS

*James E. Widmer*

How do you say thank you? One woman gave all she had! **A 9**

### 13 THANKS-GIVING SQUARE

*Laurel M. Hensel*

What does a one-acre triangle in the middle of Dallas skyscrapers have to do with Thanksgiving?

**C 9 A**

### 17 THANK YOU, JESUS, AMEN!

*Ramona Cecille*

In the midst of rage, terror and sorrow, Black South Africans sing "Siyabonga, Amen!" **C**

### 20 ON THE RECEIVING END OF THANKFULNESS

*Mary Williams*

Jesus often comes to us through people—even strangers. **C 9**

### 22 THE DAY THE MONEY TALKED

*Chris and Bob Sitze*

This is one conversation you won't want to miss! **A C**



## 2 THE LEARNING TREE

Jayne Bell

A lesson on the importance of strong roots. 9

## 4 ALL GOOD GIFTS

Lyrics from the musical *Godspell*, with a photo by Michael Lilja. 9

## 6 POEM FROM GOD IS A VERB!

Marilee Zdenek

Walking with Jesus on a day that isn't Sunday, with a photo by Marilyn Nolt. A 9

## 8 Stewardship and Lifestyle

### A WAY OF LIVING

Mary Ann Spengler

Insights from the Lutheran Laity Movement for Stewardship. 9 C

## 9 WASHED CLEAN

Esther Redelsheimer

For a cancer survivor, showers become a daily blessing. 9

## E P A R T M E N T S

Editor's note

42 Shorttakes

Letters

43 Women of the ELCA

6 Bible study

48 Devotion

9 Blessed are . . .

For the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to women of the ELCA mission areas are marked with these symbols: A = action, C = community and 9 = growth.

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# The Grand Giver

Karen Melang

"Say thank you to Aunt Sylvia for the nice present." the sort of thing kids get told at Christmas or birthdays, moms mind their children's manners. We can probably our kids to say "thank you" and maybe we can wring tha you notes out of them, but nobody can make anybody *feel* thankful.

We are coming to the time of year when we think ought to feel grateful, even if we don't. In the United States Thanksgiving is complicated by the fact that it has come mark the beginning of the holiday shopping season, with its emphasis on accumulation, rather than appreciation. Thanksgiving is more likely to find us filled with pre-holiday panic than praise. I remember one Thanksgiving, though, when praise prevailed over panic.

That year Thanksgiving was spent with the Harrington clan, our dear friends in northern Minnesota. The feast was done to perfection: the turkey, golden; the wild rice stuffing crunchy; and the orange-cranberry relish, just sour enough. The company was superb, and we whiled away the afternoon playing cards, browsing through Christmas catalogs, and catching up on all the news. The next day we trekked into Chippewa National Forest with Pete and Gail, my dear friends, and stalked the perfect Christmas tree.

That evening we made the long journey home bundled up against the Minnesota cold. The kids were fast asleep in the back seat, and the practically perfect Christmas tree was tied to the top of the car. All of a sudden I was overwhelmed and surprised by a deep sense of contentment and the feeling that my life was exceptionally good. Maybe this realization came because I had time for contemplation on the long ride home through the starlight, a rare commodity for a mother of young children. Maybe it was the simple pleasures of the weekend seeping deeply into me. All I knew was that at that moment I needed, more than anything, to be thankful.



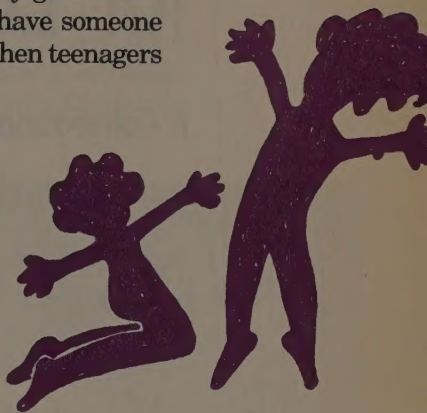
The problem for atheists," one of my teachers once said, that they don't have anyone to thank." This is not a problem for those of us who know we are God's children. When we are astounded by the wonder of this dazzling world, when we are amazed year after year by golden and red maple leaves or diamonds in the snow, we have someone to thank. When babies reach for our hands, when teenagers tell us jokes, when we have love we can count on, we have someone to thank. When what we do matters, when words strung together with care send tingles up our spines, when we belly laugh with joy, we have someone to thank.

That we have someone to thank is the first lesson of the Apostles' Creed, the Church's ancient way of telling us about God. Luther wrote in his *Small Catechism*, "and everything, behind 'my body and blood . . . food and clothing, home and family, my work, and all that I need' stands God, our grand giver of it all, with hands full of goodness more. We don't have to worry about the future, Jesus assures us, because God provides everything we need.

Giving thanks is not a virtue. It is one of our needs, and we do it not for God's sake, but for our own. We need to be thankful as much as we need food and clothing, family and friends and all the other necessities of life. If we don't get to be thankful, we may enjoy some of God's gifts but miss the best one of all, the Giver. Without the gift of gratitude, God's other gifts are likely to degenerate into mere possessions, which are as likely to possess us as we are to possess them.

But God, who knows everything we need, knows we need thankful hearts, too, and intends to give them to us. We do not need to manufacture feelings of gratitude in order to remind our manners as God's children. We only need to remind ourselves of what things really are: gifts from our generous God, who evidently gets even more joy out of giving than we do. ■

Ren Melang, a deaconess, is a communicator at the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and a regular "Give Us This Day" columnist. She is married and has two children, ages 14 and 17.



**Thanksgiving  
is not about  
accumulation, but  
appreciation.**



# Thanking God for Life and Land

## A Conversation With Women of Grace Lutheran

Michel D. Clark

**"Standing at the kitchen sink in the early morning watching the sun rise and the birds scramble at the feeder for their early morning meal, I have a sense of being a part of God's creation."**

Last spring I got together with a group of women from Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, Illinois, to hear what they thought about their lives, families and faith, and what they were thankful for their life and the family farm. The statement above was a typical expression of the thankfulness these women feel for their place in God's world.

### **Close to creation**

"There is something special about not only watching the seeds that were planted grow, but knowing that we have something to do with their growth," one woman said. Living with the land through the cycle of planting, cultivating and harvesting, the women of Grace feel close to God's ongoing creation.

"Farming is the basics of life—growing things, feeding the land. It means clean air and hard work," one woman declared. Another, looking back over her life, said, "More than ever in our senior years we draw health, courage and faith from God in the sweet essence of new-mown hay . . . blooming flowers are brief—as life is brief, so we treasure every God-given moment."

### **Trust in God**

Perhaps because their lives and livelihoods are intertwined with God's creation, I found that the women I spoke with have a strong sense of God's presence. Knowing that the rain may come or not, seeds may germinate or not, and crops may be resistant to disease or not, leads them to a deep trust in God. That trust continues even when drought or overabun-



nt rain threatens their livelihood. "The rain could be better distributed," one woman joked wryly.

Farmers develop a special sense of responsibility for the land. They recognize that the *dominion* God has given them over the land means something beyond *control*; it is a trust. And trusts that the farmer will care for the land; the farmer trusts that the land will provide not only a livelihood, but a future for their family. "Most farmers realize that they cannot ignore the needs of the land, because otherwise the family cannot continue on the land," one woman said.

### **the family farm**

the women I spoke with placed great importance on being able to pass the land on to the next generation of their family. "Sometimes you just have to realize that the land is more important than the money. There are still farmers who plow to the fences and use too many chemicals, but they're not in it for the long haul," one woman commented.

The women found much to be thankful for in their families. Farm families are often extended families, with opportunities to be together in ways not available to others. "Dad doesn't 'go off' to work, because the work is right outside the door—in the barn, the shed or the fields," one farm woman explained. Sometimes dad doesn't "come home" from work, either, but he is always around. Children take responsibility at an early age, by feeding livestock, driving a tractor or helping with chores. The family learns to depend upon each other for support and companionship—a microcosm of the family of God.

According to one woman in our group, "There is no sex discrimination on the farm." Everyone has chores, everyone contributes, and everyone understands how others depend on them.

### **strength in community**

That closeness extends from their farm to the rural community, too. In a community of family farmers, people have



**"Farming is the basics of life—growing things, feeding the land. It means clean air and hard work."**

the opportunity to get to know each other over many years. One woman remarked to another over coffee, "I remember your husband's grandfather, and hearing about his father from my grandfather." Neighbors are people who have lived around the bend, or on the next farm, for a generation or more.

In the church, there is a feeling that "we are family," because the bond we have together in Baptism is reinforced by the sharing of common tasks. In the farm community there is a family feeling as well because people have lived so close to each other, and worked so hard alongside each other. The women of Grace Lutheran spoke of their great appreciation and thankfulness for these relationships.

Perhaps because trust in God is so basic to their way of life, these rural women have learned to make the best of what happens, even when tragedy strikes. "God brings something good out of everything that happens," one woman was always to say. After going through some tough financial struggles, another farm woman was able to offer a different kind of thanks: "I'm glad we didn't buy that farm we wanted—that extra debt load would have sent us into bankruptcy!"

### **Sharing joy and grief**

Farm communities have been celebrated for their helplessness in times of crisis. When tragedy strikes in a rural area, neighbors pitch in to plant or to harvest, to feed livestock or care for the family. According to one woman in our group, men and women differ in their responses to these situations. "It is hard for men to express thanks at those times. Women seem more able to express their thanks, while at the same time seeming not to need to hear the thanks expressed," she observed.

Farmers also come together in celebrations of special events—weddings in rural congregations tend to be big-community events that spill out of the rented hall into the parking lot. The sharing of joy and grief, happiness and sorrow is an example of the community God means the church to be.

### **Church as center**

For many, their faith, centered in the life of the congregation, remains the source of their strength. "God is a constant, the church is a constant, I just know they will always be there for us, and that means a lot," one woman observed. Farm families know that in the midst of struggle, God is present to lift them up and give them hope for the future.

**Neighbors  
are people  
who have  
lived around  
the bend, or  
on the next  
farm, for a  
generation  
or more.**



ne woman noted how grateful farm people are for their  
ors. And, in truth, rural congregations offer pastors the  
opportunity to know whole families—three, sometimes  
a four generations.  
al pastors see their  
bers at the gas sta-  
the grocery store,  
park and the farms.  
ometimes it takes an  
to get a gallon of  
from the store,” one  
or noted, because  
might talk with five  
0 members of the  
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se contacts are some-  
es simply friendly  
tings, other times an  
tation to pastoral



**“God is a constant, the church is  
a constant, I just know they will  
always be there for us, and that  
means a lot.”**

### **anging life**

farm has changed in  
ast few generations,  
age” farms growing from 240 acres to over 1000. That  
a strain on everyone involved in farming, and a special  
s on the family farm. Farming is so capital-intensive that  
g farmers cannot borrow enough money to get started,  
milies have to depend on each other to get their start.  
s of equipment, labor and fuel have escalated while pric-  
ceived for farm commodities have remained low.  
t despite that difficult economic equation, most farm  
en are thankful for their lives. They give thanks for their  
onship with the land, the people who farm it and the  
nunity around them, especially the community of

Rev. Michel Clark is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church  
roxville, Illinois. Many members of Grace are actively  
ged in farming and farm-related activities. Some of the  
en who participated in the conversation referred to in  
article are pictured on these pages.

# A Gift of Thanks

James E. Widmer

**H**allmark suggests a card. FTD is partial to flowers. Your mother prefers a hand-written note. How do you say thank you?

The medium we choose to express our thanks is an integral part of gratitude. Who has not agonized over the proper gift, the right words, the "perfect" card? The more we have for which to be thankful, the more important and difficult our choice of expression.

In the community of faith, expressing thanks takes on even greater significance. Giving thanks to God for blessings counted and uncounted presents a challenge. Happily, choices abound. Songs of praise, prayers of thanksgiving, contrite hearts—all are legitimate, time-honored, and God-pleasing expressions of thanks.

But where does our giving fit into the picture of thankfulness?

Is our financial stewardship, for instance, simply an economic necessity for the maintenance of parish and wider mission? Or do our financial commitments stand as a reflection of our gratitude?

The gospel of Mark preserves a fascinating story about giving and gratitude in Chapter 12, verses 41-44. The heroine seems an unlikely example at first, but then, God sees more than we do.

Jesus was sitting near one of the offering receptacles in the Temple. Tradition holds that 13 of these chests were arranged throughout the Court of the Women in the Jeru-

salem Temple. The Court of Women was the first area of the Temple to which Jews alone were allowed access. Jewish men could continue into the Court of Israel for worship but women could not. The placement of the offering receptacles allowed both women and men to bring their gifts to the same place. Since the chests were out in the open, the nearby saw what people gave. So apparently made a display of their generosity. Perhaps this was part of the publicity-conscious piety against which Jesus warned in Mark 12.

Nevertheless, in the midst of the bringing offerings, Jesus saw a poor woman deposit two small *lepta*, the coins of least value in Judea. The gospel says they were worth a penny. Clearly, we would not call it a "large gift"!

**Y**et it was to this very gift that Jesus called the attention of his disciples. He boldly declared, "Truly I tell you, this widow has put in more than all the who are contributing to the treasury" (Mark 12:43). I think at least one disciple may have wondered if this "new math." Jesus' assessment is at odds with the disciples' conventional wisdom about gifts. Of course Jesus spent much of his time trying to liberate the disciples from the bondage of their conventional wisdom.

Jesus' evaluation of the gifts presented that day was not in monetary terms. Others deposited large sums. But Jesus looked at the gi-



## King's son

Lord,  
isn't your creation wasteful?  
Fruits never equal  
the seedlings' abundance.  
Springs scatter water.  
The sun gives out  
enormous light.  
May your bounty teach me  
greatness of heart.  
May your magnificence  
stop me being mean.  
Seeing you a prodigal  
and open-handed giver,  
let me give unstintingly,  
like a king's son,  
like God's own.

Dom Helder Camara  
Archbishop of Olinda-Recife, Brazil

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atement. What did these offer-  
say about the donors?

esus called attention to the wid-  
because she had given "every-  
g she had, all she had to live on"  
44). What a statement! Here was  
who withheld nothing in her de-  
to express thankfulness to God.  
satisfied with a tithe or giving  
, she wanted to give all she had.  
as this extravagant expression  
caught the attention of Jesus,  
remains to this day a towering  
mple of thankfulness.

What of the others? Were their  
s not expressions of gratitude as  
? They may well have been. But  
e others gave "out of their abun-

dance" (Mark 12:44). After they had  
given, they still had money left. They  
may have been thankful, but their  
gifts indicated that they were not all  
that thankful. They calculated an  
appropriate gift, based on prudent  
principles of financial management,  
and some put in substantial sums of  
money. Yet, no matter how many  
coins they put in, there remained  
some in reserve for their use. The  
widow gave all. And Jesus noticed.

Before I am deluged with com-  
plaints from certified financial plan-  
ners, let me go on record as being  
fully committed to prudent financial  
decisions. If Christians take out

mortgages, they should pay them. Christians should make plans for financing their children's educations. But I am also committed to using my financial resources to express my gratitude to God. That means I take the same care when making commitments—so I am not left with “too little” to say thank you.

God's gifts to us have not been portioned out with miserly calculation. God has been extravagant in giving. Look at the riot of colors on a hillside in autumn. Leaves turning color, even one color, would let us know God can create beauty. But God goes further and literally showers us with goodness in the beauty of creation and in the unbounded grace that redeems us in Christ. How do we say thank you for that kind of gift? It takes some thought. The widow thought, and decided that it called for something significant.

## The more we have for which to be thankful, the more important and difficult our choice of expression.

Thankfulness really has two steps: recognition and expression. One of the great opportunities of this season is to reflect on all that God has given. Those who see much for which to be thankful will find extravagant forms of expressing thankfulness, whether that is money or other means. The root of thank-

fulness is the recognition that God has given without bound or measure. It is a humbling reality. In seeking that “extravagant response,” we need to remember that God sees differently. For one who created silver and the gold, a somewhat larger check in this week's offering envelope may not make much of an expression. That is good news for those of us who think twice before writing a check that reaches into the thousands figure range. The widow's gift was not a large amount, just a large expression. She willingly gave all she had to express to the wonder of God's presence in her life.

Perhaps the most telling aspect of this story is the basis on which Jesus evaluates gifts. It is not *how much* we give, but *why* we give that matters.

In seeking an expression for your thankfulness, remember the opportunity of giving to God's work through the church. No matter what amount, a gift that reflects a grateful heart pleases God. Jesus was waiting as people put in their offerings. He still is. What does your offering say about the thankfulness in your heart? ■

*The Rev. James E. Widmer is director of stewardship services for American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and is an active member of the Lutheran Center for Stewardship Studies. Pastor Widmer lives in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, with his wife and two children.*





# Thanks-Giving Square

Laurel M. Hensel



**Thanks-Giving Square in Dallas, Texas**

**At first sight, Thanks-Giving Square**, a one-acre triangle in the middle of Dallas' downtown skyscrapers, looks like any small city park where workers spend the noon hour relaxing in the sun and eating their lunches. But a closer look reveals something else: a chapel surrounded by a white spiral.

Yet Thanks-Giving Square is not a church or temple and has no minister or regular hours of worship. No baptisms, bar mitzvahs or marriages

are performed there. But it is the site of more than 50 events and seminars a year, each one reflecting gratitude and thanksgiving in some way.

## **Why Thanksgiving?**

The theme of Thanksgiving was chosen because of its universality. Thanks and praise are central in religious faiths around the world. Thanksgiving can unite people in ways no other observance can. Thanks-Giving Square is built on the



Thanksgiving is to be fully conscious of the gifts, to give thanks even in sorrow, and to be thankful for the future.

premise that gratitude is the root of all religions, the deepest personal response to God's gift of life.

Granite plaques at each gateway to the square serve as reminders to the spiritual calling of all humankind: "Love your neighbor as yourself," for example. Another explains, "Thanks-Giving Square celebrates our gratitude to God for the gift of life."

The name, Thanks-Giving Square, is hyphenated to denote action. "When you give thanks, you make a remembrance," said Elizabeth Espersen, executive director of Thanks-Giving Square. "An action of remembering and making a difference is what the square is about."

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom is one of more than 100 leaders who signed the Declaration of World Thanksgiving. This document states that the "true spirit of Thanksgiving" is to be fully conscious of the gifts, to give thanks even in sorrow, and to be thankful for the future. Other signers include Robert Runcie, former Archbishop of Canterbury, Sylvia Talbot of Church Women United, the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II, to name a few.

"The whole idea of Thanks-Giving

Square is that it is the one place where people from all faiths come together to give thanks—a focus on response to God. It's in the moment of gratitude that we can touch each other's hands," said the Rev. M. Herbener, bishop of the ELCA Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, which is based in Dallas.

### Respect for diversity

While the Chapel of Thanksgiving is decidedly interfaith, some Dallas religious leaders feel such broad diversity—encompassing Eastern religions as well as fundamentalist Christianity—has left the square with no religious identity of its own. "It claims to be religious, but it's animism; it's even theism," one prominent Dallas Protestant minister told the *Dallas Morning News*.

In contrast, others appreciate the diversity of faiths, noting the chapel has a spiral, not a cross. "I was happy with it in the beginning," a Methodist pastor told the *Dallas Morning News*. "But I've been to worthwhile events there. I have found the people there to be sensitive to a diversity of faiths and beliefs. It's there, and I, for one, am glad."

Thanks-Giving Square embraces a number of faith traditions, including



...s in the moment of  
attitude that we can touch each  
her's hands."

*Mark Herbener, bishop of the ELCA's  
Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod*



Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Chris-  
tian, Islamic and Native American.

Does this mean it is a place of low-  
common denominator? No, ac-  
cording to Espersen, who says it pro-  
vides a symbol of humanity's highest  
common denominator. "When you  
are here, you have to be deeply  
rooted in your own tradition," she  
said. "From this place you can ap-  
preciate others who are deeply root-  
ed in theirs."

"I've heard people from minority  
religions say that Thanks-Giving  
Square is a place where they don't  
have to compromise their religion or  
culture," she said. "They consider it  
neutral turf. It's not unusual to visit  
the chapel over the noon hour and  
see a Moslem facing the back of the  
chapel while a Christian faces the  
front."

Even Hare Krishna leaders credit  
Thanks-Giving Square with their ac-  
ceptance in the broader religious  
community in Dallas.

The chapel is open for meditation  
seven days a week, with Episcopal,  
Roman Catholic and Moslem serv-  
ices held weekly.

## How it began

The inspiration for Thanks-Giving  
Square dates back to 1961 when two  
Dallas civic leaders asked, "Can a  
modern city like Dallas center its

daily life on a spiritual idea?"

Peter Stewart, former Dallas city  
planner, organized a nonprofit foun-  
dation in 1963 and raised \$6 million  
for the project. He bought the land in  
1968 and completed work in 1977. It  
is supported with contributions from  
individuals, corporations and other  
foundations.

Thanks-Giving Square started as  
a joint venture between the city and  
the foundation, but after years of  
haggling, the city dropped its in-  
volvement in all but the under-  
ground plans for various shops and  
pedestrian tunnels. Today, the city's  
annual payment to the foundation  
for underground leases averages  
about \$200,000, according to Esper-  
sen.

## Spiritual Dairy Queen?

Thanks-Giving Square's marble ag-  
gregate chapel is thought to be the  
only spiral construction of its type in  
the world, and it holds the world's  
largest horizontal stained-glass ceil-  
ing. The Chapel of Thanksgiving,  
which seats up to 90 people, is known  
for its "spiral of life," curving white  
marble sometimes described as a  
scroll, a flame, a flower unfolding  
and even a "spiritual Dairy Queen."

Beneath the chapel, the Hall of  
World Thanksgiving houses a small  
museum and library, including a



The Chapel of Thanksgiving is known for its “spiral of life,” sometimes described as a scroll, and even a “spiritual Dairy Queen.”

presidential collection of thanksgiving proclamations—the only place in the nation where the proclamations of at least 24 presidents and the governors of all 50 states are displayed.

Fifteen feet below the street surface, a waterfall highlights a garden, and serves as a buffer for the traffic noise above.

At one end of the triangle, three bronze bells hang from a 50-foot tower, symbolically calling the world to celebrate thanksgiving.

### Can other cities try this?

While Thanksgiving celebrations in Texas date back as far as 1861, Dallas may not be the only place where a Thanks-Giving Square could work.

According to Espersen, the city of Belfast in Northern Ireland is interested. Myrtle Smith, a Christian Scientist from Belfast, read about Thanks-Giving Square in the *Christian Science Monitor* and decided to come to Dallas to see it for herself. She asked lots of questions and returned home inspired to convince Catholic, Protestant, media and city leaders to replicate it. “If we could have a place like this,” she told Espersen, “it would bring healing to our city,” long plagued by religious conflict and civil war.

### Directions for the future

Espersen says the Square is entering its second phase with a new long-term project called “Hemisphere Congress of the Spirit.” The controversial 500th anniversary of the rival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas raised many issues; the goal of the hemisphere congress is to bring together dozens of religious leaders from around the world in a series of conferences over several years “to look toward the next 500 years and invite the Spirit to guide us,” she said. They hope to persuade the United Nations to declare the year 2000 as a Year of Thanksgiving. ■

**For more information,** contact the National Thanksgiving Commission, P.O. Box 1777, Dallas, TX 75221; (214) 969-1977.

*Laurel Hensel, associate director for interpretation for the ELCA World Hunger Program, lives in Dallas, Texas.*



# Thank You, Jesus, Amen!

amona Cecille

**L**ast year, around Thanksgiving, my friend Jean received news from 3000 miles away that her only brother was dying of cancer. Somehow she scraped together money for airfare to visit George in Philadelphia.

Jean cried all the way to Philadelphia. But when she touched down, somehow peace prevailed in her. She visited her brother, shaved him and massaged his hands with lotion. Jean shared feelings with George that she had never dared to speak before. She reminded him of the compassion and power of Jesus in their lives. Somehow, Jean and George thanked and praised God while they stood at the edge of George's life.

Jean returned home, grateful to have spent time with George. When the news came that he had died, she felt at peace. Her friends bought her a plane ticket so she could attend George's memorial service. Jean felt deep loss as well as inexpressible joy, the joy she knew George was experiencing in God's presence. Praise and thanksgiving burst through the songs and sermon that commended George into God's unchanging hands.

I do not know how the tragic, untimely death of an only brother turned itself into an occasion for thanking and praising God. I do not know how people overwhelmed by loss and grief in their lives can sing for joy. I wonder where we receive the power to thank and praise God?

Sometimes it seems that giving thanks only fits into a measured compartment. It is restricted by convention. We learn to say "Thank you" at an early age. It becomes a reflex: something to be recited at the proper time, with or without the spirit of thanksgiving.

Where does the power to praise and thank God come from when precious people and precious resources have been snatched away from us?

These gnawing thoughts followed me all the way to Southern Africa last spring. I had the awesome opportunity



to travel through Southern Africa as part of a study tour from my seminary. I am grateful to the congregations who sponsored me and for the dancers who raised money for us all to go. Yet while I was in South Africa and Namibia, I found much for which I could not give thanks.

In the dry, dusty land of both countries, plants struggle to grow.

Those that do are in danger of being trampled as animals wander around looking for water. The drought aggravated the dry season in both countries. The red clay dust of South Africa and the smoky gray dust of Namibia cried out for rain. It had not rained in South Africa and Namibia for six months. In the Black townships and ghettos, most roads are not paved. As you walk or drive alone, you kick up dust. Dust collects on your shoes, on your clothes, in your hair and in your throat. It had not rained in the land for *six months*.

The right to this parched land is a large issue in

South Africa, in the midst of negotiations to make

it a country that is not governed on the basis of race.

Under apartheid, the policy of separation of the races, the South African government took the land of Black South Africans and forced them to live on "homelands." Since South African president F. W. de Klerk began to dismantle apartheid three years ago, many Black South Africans have been reclaiming their land and building shacks in their old communities. The government calls them "squatters." The more than 40 women, children and men massacred in Boipatong, South Africa, June 17, 1992, were

"squatters."

These Black South Africans have been the target of violence by *Inkatha* (a Black opposition party to the African National Congress, or ANC). Amnesty International, Anglican bishop Desmond Tutu, and the ANC have accused the government of being the "hidden hand" behind the violence.

Confronting these situations while in that country did not conjure up thanksgiving and praise in me. Rather rage, terror and sorrow followed me through

the land. "*Tsezenina*," the people sing in the Xhosa language. "What have we done to deserve this treatment? Is our sin to blame?" It is a song that gets at the core of the issue.

Yet Black South Africans under the threat



A typical dwelling constructed by so-called "squatters" in Black townships.

death in their country are still empowered to thank and praise God. Their songs and their dances are death-defying. They know God can change their circumstances with a snap of God's finger. Hope keeps them alive.

In Zulu, a South Africa language, the word *siyabonga* is interpreted as "we thank you." This word has the strong connotation "we praise you." "*Siyabonga, Amen*" is a song the people sing and dance in Namibia. It is so infectious that we Americans joined with them. We sang it in the great ecumenical service in Walvis Bay. We all kicked up dust dancing with students and professors at the Namibian seminary in Paulinum. "*Siyabonga, Amen!*" Thank you, Jesus, Amen!"

As I sang with gusto and danced for joy, I still wondered where does the power to thank and praise God come from?

My questioning led me to the book of Psalms. Many psalms cry out to God, who hears, sees and moves! In Psalm 22, that familiar psalm we hear on Good Friday, we are connected with the suffering of Jesus. Jesus hung on a cross, stripped of humanity: no rights, no land, no water. This psalm begins in the depth of anguish yet somehow breaks loose into praise and thanksgiving to God. Verse 25 shouts, "From you comes my praise in the great congregation" (New Revised Standard Version).

Ah . . . the spirit of thanksgiving and praise comes from God, God alone! We cannot make thanksgiving happen inside of us. We cannot cause praise to rise up within us. Thanksgiving and praise come from the one who is worthy of thanksgiving and praise. No matter what the circumstance, God is worthy to be praised.

The heart that is filled with thanksgiving and praise can be activated into singing, dancing, moving toward justice. Out of the gray dust of Namibia women stand together to make bricks and build homes for their families. "Thank you, Jesus, Amen!"

In Black townships in South Africa, families are reclaiming their right to live in their communities. They shall not be moved, even though they live today under the threat of death. "*Siyabonga, Amen!*" ■

**Ah . . . the spirit of  
thanksgiving and praise  
comes from God, God  
alone! We cannot make  
thanksgiving happen  
inside of us.**

*Monica Cecille is a free-lance writer and mother of Tona, 22, Malcolm, 20 and Jasmin, 10. Her ministry, sharing liturgical dance, led her to study at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, where she is now a senior.*



# On the Receiving End of Thankfulness

Mary Williams

**“Thank you, thank you, thank you.”** For most of my life those were words I heard, not said.

Even as a child during the Depression, my life was full and happy. When one is a child, what happens seems normal, because that’s all we know. So sugar bread and milk for supper, cardboard to cover holes in shoes, no ice cream or treats—it was all okay.

Then one day the circus came to town. And my brother, sister and I could go. What excitement! Halfway through the circus, however, I looked around and sensed we were sitting in the “poor kids” section: a *stranger* had given my parents the tickets. I felt humiliated.

The economy improved, and as I grew to adulthood, my dreams grew too. They were simple dreams: graduate, work, meet and marry a good man, raise a family and live happily ever after. And, lo and behold, the dreams became a reality. Life as a wife and mother was rich and fulfilling. We built a small home in the town I was raised in. Our extended family was nearby. The days were filled with many opportunities to give to my family, church, school, friends and neighborhood. The “fun-

ny feelings” of the little girl at the circus seemed far away. I was on the giving end now; the thank-yous just kept coming and coming.

**Then, eight years into our marriage,** my husband became seriously ill, so ill that the doctors did not anticipate a full recovery. Many of you can imagine the feelings that overcame me as my world seemed to crash around me. There were days—and especially nights—of pure panic. My prayers were filled with pleas to God to make this terrible thing that was happening to us *go away*.

Reality hit home when I realized the sum of our financial assets was \$250. All I could say was, “God help us!” And God did.

Our family and friends surrounded us with support and loving care. To fill the immediate financial crisis, the men in my husband’s company gave me a check. My father covered our mortgage. Neighbors cared for our two little children while I was at the hospital. Church friends brought meals. I was saying a lot of thank-yous, and it was hard.

About a month into our ordeal, military subsidy and medical insurance kicked in, helping us to get back on our financial feet. My husband



**One night  
in December,  
toward  
evening, the  
children and  
I saw a  
Salvation  
Army truck  
pull up in  
front of the  
house.**

or. I accepted the box in a daze. The children were delighted to receive the present and dug right in to the surprise. Inside the box were about a dozen brightly wrapped gifts. The children opened theirs, and I eagerly started to unwrap some. There were hand-knit mittens, eaters, books and toys for the children, cologne for me, and Christmas cookies and candy.

**Suddenly I felt like the poor  
d at the circus.** Strangers had prepared these gifts. I was a receiver again. I was the one saying thank you, and it was uncomfortable and all hard to do.

But, thanks be to the grace of God, that feeling soon faded and the real meaning of the box began to sink in.

I was learning an important lesson. I began to realize that I had to learn first how to *receive* God's gift of unconditional love before I could fully *give* and share God's gifts with others.

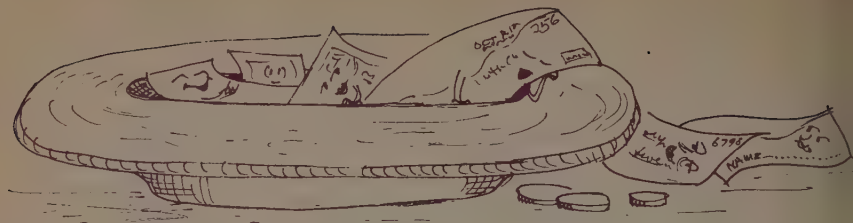
Although the box came almost 40 years ago, the experience of receiving it—of accepting it—stays with me. Because of this experience I try to remember to be *thankful* for God's unconditional love, and *receive* it joyfully. I try to remember that Jesus often comes to us through other people, sometimes through strangers.

**I was the one  
saying thank  
you, and it  
was hard.**

The box of gifts taught me lessons about giving as well. There is no giving without receiving. In so many ways

the two are tied together in the embrace of God's love. So now I try to give not because I'm supposed to, or because it makes me feel good. Rather, I try to give unconditionally and joyfully, as God gives to me. ■

*The author's husband fully recovered from his illness, and together they live a full and thankful life. They live in the Midwest, where she writes under the pen name Mary Williams.*



# The Day the Money Talked

Chris and Bob Sitze

**T**he pastor's "Amen" signals the end to yet another "Stewardship Sunday" sermon. A breeze of activity flutters through the congregation as purses and pockets are being searched for the day's offering. Deep in the back of the sanctuary the ushers stir to action, arranging themselves in a semblance of order, ready for their weekly march to the altar.

And in each pew, bits and pieces of money—checks and coins and bills of all sizes—get ready for their transfer from giver to plate, ready to take on new meaning as offerings.

A sizable check in one of the front pews is the first to start the financial conversation. "So what are the rest of you little guys doing in here, anyhow? Don't you know we have a church to support here? You ought to see if you can't get your little givers to make you a little bigger next time."

A ten-dollar bill speaks up. "Some of us 'little guys' are a lot bigger than you might guess. We're coming from the deep end of the pool with motives you could ever imagine."

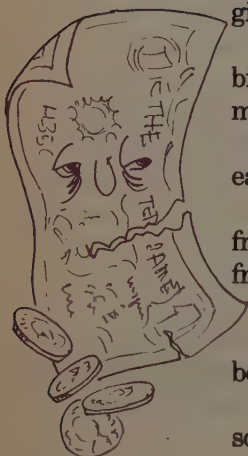
"Like what?" answers the big check, trying to soften its earlier criticism.

"Like that wad of one-dollar bills two rows back; they come from a 15-year-old who gives a share of everything she earns from odd jobs. Feels like she owes it to God."

"For what?"

"For being alive after an accident in which she could have been killed."

"Sounds superstitious to me, like she's paying God back for something God did."



Nope. She was just taught by her parents to think of giving as part of thanksgiving, as something you 'just do' as a Christian."

Another sizable donation jumps in. "And I personally know three other checks as big as me who have been given out of love for this church, even for this building. Well, maybe not *only* for this building, but for all the things that happen inside and outside of this building—the mission of the people who come and worship here."

"Hmmm. That's interesting. How about the rest of you? Why are you being put in the collection plate?"

"I'm a special offering," says a small flowery check in a specially-addressed envelope. "I'm going to a program for Hispanic pastors. My giver really believes in the possibilities of the program. Wants it to keep going on and on."

"I'm just a weekly offering," pipes up a money order in the amount of \$46.00. "My giver believes in tithing from the moment he cashes his paycheck."

"That's different from my givers' idea about tithing," interrupts another sizable check. "My giving family contributes 10 percent from the "gross pay" line on their paycheck. That's what I become—10 percent of gross—like a profit margin!"

The special offering envelope is back with a comment. "Most of you sound like you're pretty automatic—ho-hum and no big deal. Isn't there any feeling attached to any of you?"

**T**his attracts the attention of two full pews of regular offering envelopes, who certainly aren't about to be called "ho-hum" offerings!

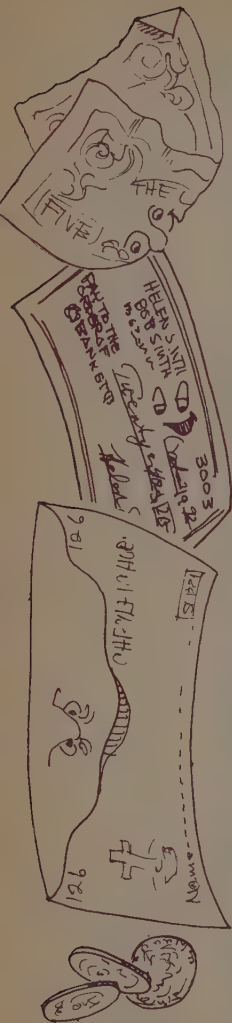
"My giver says a prayer before she writes me out every Sunday," says one check. "She prays for wisdom in using all her money, thanks God for the week to come, and asks God to bless the use of her offering. That's a pretty strong feeling, don't you ask me."

"And I'm a protest check," says another envelope, trying to hide her identity. "My giver is trying to bypass our congregational needs so that mission work in other lands can continue. I'm not sure I feel too good about that, but what's a check supposed to do?"

"I'm only one part of what my giver contributes each month," a monogrammed and embossed check reports. "My giver divides her monthly giving among five different places: the Red Cross, United Way, Social Security. . . ."







"Social Security?" asks a roll of quarters with no identification. "How's that a gift?"

"My giver thinks of all the good that happens because the money is deducted from her paycheck, and she's glad that she has a job in the first place. So she says a prayer of thanks for her social security deduction."

"I'm pretty sure this place is her favorite, though. She looks at the people in these pews as if they were her own family."

"I may not seem like much," says a wrinkled collection of bills and loose change, "but I'm the end result of an agreement between my giver and her husband, who doesn't believe in giving money to 'those hypocritical religious types.' She sacrifices a lot just to come to church every Sunday."

The roll of quarters interjects a confession. "That's why you don't see any marks on me. I'm a day's worth of time and extra income that my giver just hands over as one way to avoid conflict with her spouse about proportionate giving."

The plates continue their way across rows of pews, moving toward the back of the church, where young families and visitors wait for the velvet-lined containers. More checks and bills are added, each welcomed to the growing assortment of contributions this day, each quizzed about the feelings that prompted their givers that prompted their being offered.

The congregation rises to its feet as the music of the offertory swells to singing volume. The assortment of money grows silent as the plates are brought forward.

The differences in motives and feelings that prompted the offerings now melt together in a unity of purpose as the assisting minister's prayer of blessing fills the sanctuary.

"We offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have freely given us . . . signs of your gracious love. . . ."

In the moment of silence that accompanies the ushers bowing down the aisle, the bits and pieces of money—now blessed and set aside—know their new and continuing purposes. Another Sunday offering is complete. ■

*Chris and Bob Sitze have shared writing projects for over 20 years. They are thankful for their three children; for Faith Lutheran Church in Glen Ellyn, Illinois; and for their work. Chris is an elementary-school teacher and Bob is on the staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Division of Congregational Ministries.*

# Session 11

## Parables of Discipleship

Judith A. VanOsdol-Hansen  
Robert J. LaRiviere

Bible Basis: Matthew 23:1—25:46

Study Text: Matthew 25:1-46

### Session Overview

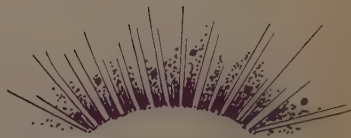
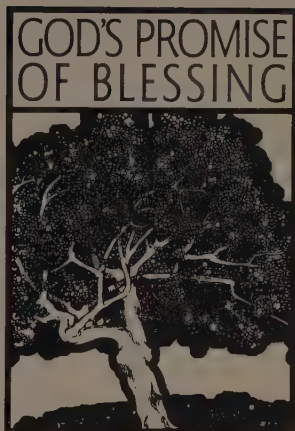
This session explores the blessings of waiting, working and serving as these activities relate to present-day life and to eternity.

### Opening Prayer

*Write your words on our hearts and minds, Lord. Give us courage to use our gifts to bring glory to you. Help us to reflect your righteousness, and by your grace make us ready for the day of judgment. Amen.*

### Understanding the Word

**Read Matthew 25:1-13.** In this chapter we learn about a problem that was a pressing concern for early Christians, and especially for those to whom Matthew was writing in his day. The first few decades after the resurrection, Jesus' followers believed he would soon return in glory to establish his perfect reign. This hope gave them courage and patience to suffer and sacrifice in service to God. Each day was lived in the expectation that Jesus would return at any time.



But as the years passed and generations grew old and died, some said, "Why wait for a Savior who may never reappear?" They spent less energy in preparing to welcome Jesus and became careless in their discipleship. Others, however, continued to be ready, still believing in the promise and living in watchfulness.

Palestinian custom is the basis for the parable of the 10 bridesmaids. It was customary for bridesmaids to wait for the bridegroom who would then take the bride from her house to his own. The bridesmaids would greet him with bright torches and celebration. This particular time he is delayed, so the bridesmaids fall asleep (verse 5). Then he arrives suddenly, with no advance warning (verse 6).

The return of the Messiah will be the same, the text suggests. At that moment, those unprepared will be sent away forever. Those who are faithful, who are prepared, will be welcomed to the wedding banquet.

# 1

**Read verse 13** as the climax of the parable. Then go back and **reread verses 1-13**. Note that both groups of bridesmaids sleep (verse 5). In what way, then, are some "prepared"? How do you think Christians should prepare for Jesus' coming?

Jesus' words in verse 12 are very harsh: "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." But there is no soft or easy way to prepare Christians for Christ's return. One lesson of the parable is that now is the time for repentance and renewal. The window of opportunity will not stay open forever. The parable conveys a sense of urgency.

Consider the action of the parable. All the bridesmaids go to prepare their lamps (verse 7). Those without oil assume that the others will share with them (verse 8). Instead, they have to run off into the night in search of oil.

Meanwhile, the bridegroom and the wise bridesmaids move swiftly to the wedding feast and close the door (verse 10). Later, the foolish bridesmaids come knocking, but they are not allowed to enter the banquet (verses 11-12).



## 2

signing overly specific meaning to each in the parable can limit its message, we can "try on" certain interpretations and see how well they work. If we suppose, at the moment, that the oil in the lamps is faith, what might this parable tell us about how Christians should prepare for Jesus? Can faith be borrowed from someone else? Why or why not?

Some Christians take seriously the exhortation to keep awake (verse 13) and others seem to disregard it. Mature Christians could feel some sense of urgency about strengthening their own faith and the faith of others while there is still time.

When the bridegroom comes (that is, when Christ returns), it will be too late to "borrow" faith from someone else. In the meantime, however, Christians can and do build each other up in the faith in preparation for that final day. This is part of the teaching ministry of the church.

## 3

In some ways, the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids may seem out of keeping with the mercy of Jesus. The five who are "wise" show no mercy to the foolish maidens and will not give them oil. The bridegroom shows no mercy to the foolish maidens when they return. What, if anything, do you think is merciful about this parable?

Like the parable of the wise and foolish maidens, the parable of the talents (verses 14-30) focuses on people who are waiting for the one who apparently has been delayed. In this second parable, servants await a master who, before leaving, has entrusted them with various sums of money. Note that just one talent was probably worth about \$1000 and would take a worker many years to earn.



## 4

**Read verses 14-30.** Then retell the parable in your own words. What is comforting about the parable? What is disturbing? What does the parable tell us about faith? About our responsibilities in this life?

In verses 20-23, what seems to be most important to the master? Notice that although the servants had different amounts to work with, the master's commendation in verses 21 and 23 is the same for both servants. What does this suggest to you about what God expects of his servants?

## 5

**Read verses 24-25.** What seems to have prevented this servant from investing the one talent he has received? Do you think his perception of the master is accurate (verse 24)?

Earlier in the gospel, two blind men ask Jesus for healing. He replies, "According to your faith let it be done to you" (9:29). How might that statement apply to the parable of the talents? How important is risk-taking in the life of faith?

## 6

**Look again at 25:14-30.** What risks has the master taken in this parable? What risks do you think God has taken for you? In other words, what talents, responsibilities, or resources has God given you?

## 7

What similarities do you find between the stories of the wise and foolish maidens and the talents? In one sentence, try to summarize the main point of these two parables.

**Read verses 31-46.** *Can we serve without knowing it? What kinds of things really serve the Lord? These questions concerned Matthew's audience and have always concerned Christians who seek to do God's will.*

In this passage, Jesus suggests that many people may serve without realizing it, and others who think they are doing the right thing are not really serving him at all. Jesus knows what is in our hearts, even when we don't. Note that both the righteous and the cursed people are surprised and ask, "When was it we served you?" (verses 37-39, 44).

## 8

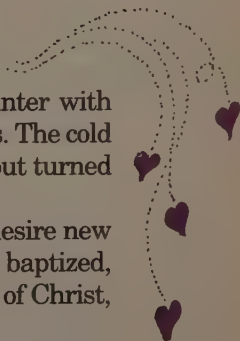
*What is the basis for the judgment? According to verses 35-36, in whom do we see the work of Jesus in this world? The work of Jesus is the recreation of the human heart. At the time of the last judgment, hearts were found to be either caring or cold. There was no middle ground.*

A caring heart has been made that way by an encounter with Jesus, an encounter which changed the person's actions. The cold heart, in contrast, encountered Jesus in needy people but turned away.

Now, then, are we to be saved? All who repent and desire new hearts are saved by the gift of a new heart. Christians are baptized, receive forgiveness and strength in the body and blood of Christ, and grow in faith through discipleship. They are truly blessed when they respond to human need with words of mercy and lives of mercy. Because God is love and because Jesus is almighty, the Savior hears and responds to the cries of all people in need.

His teaching is an invitation to give our hearts to the Lord of all and our lives to serving others. This is not something we do once and are done with it. Such a one-time attitude leaves a person vulnerable to condemnation: "I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink" (verse 42).

Jesus teaches us about the joy of meeting the needy and re-





sponding with generosity and compassion. It is the joy of being in the presence of the Lord.

### *Interpreting the Word*

Each of the stories found in Chapter 25 ends on a note of warning. The stories are meant to admonish and inspire Christians to be faithful servants of the Lord. Jesus is present with us now, and he will come again in glory to establish his reign.

The last judgment scene also prepares the reader to see Jesus as Lord as he goes to his death (26:2). Jesus will soon be hungry and thirsty, a prisoner condemned to die. Yet Jesus accepts this and enters into it as God's will. If he experiences fear, he does not allow it to keep him from the path of service.

## 9

*How do fear and anxiety limit faith and discipleship? How can our fears be overcome so that we can serve God willingly?*

Anxiety seems to be the emotional state of many people today. In 25:14-30, anxiety prevents the servant from using his talent, and this finally results in judgment. A distorted view of the master contributes to the servant's anxiety.

### *Living the Word*

What do we do with our talents? God wants faith to be at work in us, making us good and trustworthy servants of God.

God is the creator and sustainer of the world. God has chosen to work through people. The work we do in life is an opportunity to share in sustaining the world with honesty, dignity, and justice.

God cares about the ordinary and routine parts of our lives. Sometimes we may think the decisions we make and the responsibilities we have are not important enough to interest God; God is too busy elsewhere.

But God is not a mere human being who needs a priority list to get through each day. God is limitless, and God cares about how we use the time, talents and resources with which we are entrusted. God wants us to use these for the good of other people, in witness and mercy.

God's concern is for all people. Jesus' teaching on judgment in verses 31-46 is often used by liberation theologians who advocate the poor and oppressed. The text may be a call to service to us who may not realize how wealthy we really are. Jesus calls every Christian to invest time and talent, life and love in service of the kingdom and in acts of mercy.

## Looking Ahead

Session 12 is our final session in this yearlong look at Matthew. It will end at the beginning, with Matthew 1:1—2:23, which holds the Christmas story for us.

*The Rev. Judith VanOsdol-Hansen is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chicago, Illinois; the Rev. Robert LaRiviere is pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Schoenersville, Pennsylvania.*

*The Promise of Blessing: A Study of the Gospel of Matthew* was prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America under the direction of the Rev. Ivis LaRiviere-Mestre, Editor. Contributing Editor: The Rev. Nancy Koester. Copyright © 1992 Augsburg Fortress. May not be reproduced without permission.

Comments and questions relating to the Bible study should be sent to the Rev. Karen Battle, Director for Educational Resources, Women of the ELCA, 555 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO JANUARY

### Faith, Hope, and Love:

**A Study of 1 Corinthians** is the 1993 Lutheran Woman Today Bible study. Session 1 will appear in the January 1993 issue of the magazine. See p. 43 in this issue for a general overview of the study and session topics and texts. Helpful supplementary materials include a **leader guide** with aids for facilitating each study session (order one for each leader—code 2-9326, \$3.95), and a **Bible study resource book** with biblical commentary and theological interpretation of biblical themes (suggested for leaders and participants—order code 2-9325, \$4.25). Also available are **1993 Daily Bible Readings**, which offer biblical texts to complement the First Corinthians study (code 2-9338, \$2.10 a dozen, or \$14.75 for 100.)

# The Learning Tree

Jayne Bell

"I'm worried," I confided to my friends: the trees, the dogs, the typewriter, my husband Bob.

They all asked, "What are you worried about?"

"Oh, just the regular stuff. Will my health hold up as I'm growing older? It seems that everything I read or see on TV is about possible diseases. I've had close encounters with a couple of them myself; will disease come back? Will my friends fall away? Will I be left totally alone?"

"I know," Bob empathized. Your biggest fear is being alone. My biggest fear is being poor."

"But we've been both of those things

before, and we may become them again. We made it through before. Where is my faith?"

"Remember the birds of the air and the lilies of the field?" Bob counseled. "Why don't you take a walk on the land and see if you can shake off some of your worry?"

I followed his advice and walked into the bright summer landscape with the

Things  
change . . . .  
So embrace  
the newness  
with courage.

three dogs bouncing happily at my side. "This is a pattern, it?" I said to myself. Soon as I have time to think—like now, when school's out—the old negative, worrisome thoughts rush in.

I stepped with confidence among prairie flowers: white oxeye daisies, wide yellow brown-eyed Susans, star-burst Queen Anne's lace. I stooped to pick some of the bountiful yellow flowers, my drawing pen dropped to the ground, as if to say, "You can't capture it. Just live it."

"... Pleased with morning light;/The flowers beneath the mower's hand/Lie withering 'ere tis night." This verse "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" flowed through my mind. "What, I told myself. "All things die and are reborn again; life is constant change. I stand in the creek and never be in the same water twice. Things change . . . . So embrace the newness with courage," I told myself. "Courage is something you can choose to have."



I climbed the steep hill to my favorite tree in the forest—"the Survivor Tree," we call it—where it clings to the rocky hillside. Its thick trunk must have been nearly 100 years old. The trunk rises from the earth where its invisible roots must be very strong and strong; then it curves to the sky like a half question mark, its upper end showing the scars of a severe trauma earlier in life.

Like the Survivor Tree, I am resting in the roots of my faith.

I sat on a flat, mossy rock and studied the Survivor tree. From the end of the curved trunk a scarred branch rises 10 feet into the air and holds a few green leaves on thin upper branches. But behind this scarred limb a second healthy trunk had grown straight up, over 30 feet tall, well-proportioned with



*A tree print created by solar etching.*

abundant branches and leaves.

The Survivor Tree has seen many changes, both in its own life and the surrounding woods. Bob said just yesterday as he and I sat under a triple-trunked elm tree by the creek bank, "I wonder what it's like to be a tree, just to stand and stand and observe the passing scene. I guess it's OK. You'd always know where you stood. You'd have strong roots."

"Here's my faith," I thought, "in my roots. It's there. I just have to reach down and call upon it to nourish me."

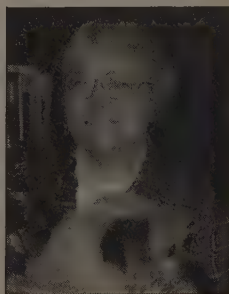
The wildflowers I picked were already wilting. I had to get them back to some water. I stood and gave the tree a pat.

"Good old tree. God bless me."

When I got home, Bob asked me if I was "still worried."

"Nope," I said, "cause I'm resting on the roots of my faith." ■

*Jayne Bell and her husband, Bob, operate Wellspring Farms, a small farm in southeast Missouri. She commutes daily to St. Louis, where she teaches high school math. Together Jayne and Bob write a weekly column, "Tickled Ink," for their local newspaper.*





# All Good Gifts

We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land,  
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand.  
He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain,  
The breezes and the sunshine and soft refreshing rain.

Chorus    **All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above.  
So thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord, for all his love.**

We thank Thee then, oh Father, for all things bright and good,  
The seedtime and the harvest, our life, our health, our food.  
No gifts have we to offer for all thy love imparts,  
But that which Thou desirest our humble, thankful hearts.

Chorus    **All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above.  
So thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord, for all his love.  
I really want to thank you, Lord.  
I want to thank you, Lord,  
Thank you for all of your love.  
Oh, thank you, Lord.  
I want to thank you, Lord, thank you, Lord.**

*from the musical Godspell (1971); text by Matthias Claudius, 1740-1815;  
Jane M. Campbell, 1817-1878, alt.; adapt. Stephen Schwartz.*





"I can pray," said my child, "Anywhere I am,  
Even riding on my bike without my hands!"  
Little girl, if you believe that

then you have learned a lesson well,

And God will ride with you  
and walk with you  
and dance with you  
and smile.

There you go—

spinning cartwheels—  
touching the cool earth with your hands,  
feeling the new grass sprout between your fingers,  
reaching to the heavens with your toes.

There you go—

with a giggle and a prayer,  
walking with Jesus on a day that isn't Sunday,  
in a place that isn't special,  
in your grubby jeans  
and tangled wind-tossed hair.

Lord, I'm so glad she doesn't need some formal kind of prayer,  
For Tammy's learned to talk with you  
while standing on her head,  
And Tammy's learned to feel you near  
while doing cartwheels in the air.

*Marilee Zdenek*

*from God Is a Verb! by Marilee Zdenek, copyright © 1974 Word Inc., Dallas,  
Texas. Used by permission.*

# Stewardship and Lifestyle: A Way of Living

Mary Ann Spengler

Susan is thankful the Lord has given her energy to participate in a daily aerobics program. "A gift freely given, a gift to be carefully cared for"—that is how Susan sees her body. Aerobics is a bonus, an enjoyable extra in her busy schedule as a homemaker.

I met Susan in the videotape used in a Lutheran Laity Movement Seminar on Stewardship and Lifestyle. These seminars offer congregations a chance to examine personal and corporate stewardship lifestyles; a new concept in stewardship ministry. I got to see firsthand how the one-day seminars help people explore stewardship of creation, our bodies, our resources. At a seminar I led in Newport, Minnesota, earlier this year, the one-to-one discussions and sharing underscored for all of us the truth that all we do in our lives is an act of stewardship.

Dedicated people share their insights on the videotape. There is Jim, a mechanic who uses his talents to help his congregation maintain a bus. And Jennie, a Native American manager of human resources in a large organization, who believes that people are her company's most valuable asset. Yet good stewardship

has often meant personnel cutbacks and tough decisions she has had to work through.

I was especially impressed by Harry, a farmer in the Midwest running a third-generation farm—both a risky business and a life-satisfying opportunity. The video's snapshot of Harry concludes as he takes us down the aisle of Faith Lutheran Church where he regularly thanks God for immeasurable gifts and rededicates his life as a steward. I also found a kindred spirit in the host of the video, the Rev. Glenn Schoonover, when he says, "Stewardship and lifestyle are one and the same, a way of living."

The Lutheran Laity Movement Stewardship (LLM) is a 2800-member organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. About 30 percent of its members are women. For more information on the seminars, contact Clinton Schroeder, The Lutheran Laity Movement Stewardship, 8765 West Higgins Rd., Chicago, Illinois 60631-4189; call 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2790. ■

*Mary Ann Spengler, Indianapolis, Indiana, is a member of the LLM board of directors and a pastor's wife.*





# Washed Clean

Esther Redelsheimer

To her it was sheer pleasure, and she regarded it with reverence. For a warm shower had become her daily blessing.

Once she'd been in the hospital five days recovering from surgery—a double mastectomy—and in no condition to shower. First her skin began to itch, then her head. Her hair separated into oily strings. When she looked in the mirror, she saw a pale and bed-weary *patient*—a cancer patient.

"If I could just lean over the sink and wash my hair," she told a nurse, "I know I'd feel better." A nurse's aide offered to wash her hair for her. She could hardly wait.

What an improvement when at last she had clean hair again! It was the beginning of her return to normalcy and to wellness.

The day after her shampoo, she was released from the hospital. The doctor told her she could take showers if she taped plastic bags over her incisions.

Her showers became God's promise of daily miracles. They gave her hope, assurance of life after surgery. She was not a cancer patient anymore, she was a cancer survivor. Those simple warm showers

became her leap toward recovery. Each time she took one she told herself not to forget how fantastic it was. She wanted to remember, always, exactly how it felt to be warmed by the water, and to have the slippery soap suds on her skin and the gentle massage of tiny drops on her back. It was not only refreshing and cleansing, but renewing.

Showers, though, took on one other significance that she could not have predicted. They reminded her of God's forgiveness. How much more she understood the Bible's vivid and frequent references to washing. There is washing of feet, washing of hands, washing of robes and washing of sin. God's forgiveness is compared to being washed clean. . . . Her warm showers became instruments of God's healing, leaving her a restored, healthier person, connected in life and fully forgiven. ■

*Esther Redelsheimer is a writer, mother and grandmother. She is active as a Stephen minister and member of Our Savior's Lutheran in Naperville, Illinois.*

**“You are the salt of the earth. . . .” Matthew 5:13**

# Debbie

Barbara Jurgensen

As Carolyn drove toward the city to help in the pantry of her congregation's sister church, she felt good about being useful—but she also wondered if some of the people couldn't do more to help themselves.

Reaching the church, she found a large room where volunteers were bagging the food. In the adjoining nursery three children were playing.

She began working with a young woman named Debbie who walked with a slight limp. Through the sunny east windows they could see a long line of people waiting outside. “Do all those people really need help?” Carolyn asked.

Debbie looked at the line. “I live in this neighborhood and I know these people. It's true that a few of them could try a little harder. But almost all of them are here because life has dealt them some hard blows.

“Take the first woman—her husband was killed in an accident, leaving her with three children. She's taken in two other children and does bookkeeping, but she's had it tough.

“Or look at the younger man behind her—he does odd jobs when he can. When he was 11, he and his little brother were swimming in the river and his brother got caught in the current and was swept away—while he watched helplessly. He's never gotten over it. He hasn't stayed in counseling because he can't bear to relive that terrible day. He comes to church and we're all praying that in time he'll let our loving Lord give him peace.

“Or take me—my mother couldn't keep me so I was placed in a foster home. As I got older I kept hoping someone would adopt me, but with this limp. . . . By the time I was 16 I was in my sixth foster home. I never knew what it was to be wanted, so when a boy at school got interested in me, I was overjoyed. Soon I was pregnant. So we both quit school and started working—I'm a good typist.

“After our daughter was born I paid a neighbor to watch her. Two years later, when our son was born with a hip problem like mine, the medical bills started to pile up. Then one morning when I woke

"I'd never been to church until one of the pantry workers asked me to go with her a year ago. I think she's one of those 'salt of the earth' people."

up I found a note from my husband saying he was leaving.

"I cried for two whole days. Then I decided I needed to cut down on expenses and get some training so I could support us, so I invited a friend with a child to move in and share the rent and child care. I watch the kids during the day while she works, then in the evening and on weekends she watches them while I go for my GED.

"In a few months I'll be going on to business school at night. My school counselor says I'm smart and have skills in organizing things and working with people, so I'm hoping to be an office manager. I'm on public assistance now, but soon I can make it on my own."

Carolyn listened with astonishment. These people's lives were so different from hers. She'd been raised by parents who loved her, then she married a man who was able to support the family—and they'd all been healthy. . . .

Now Debbie was pointing toward the play area. "See that smallest girl and the boy? They're my kids. The other is my friend's daughter. I used to stand outside

with them; now they play while I help with the food. Five of the eight people working here used to stand outside in line. Some of us have started coming to church—and my girl is in Sunday school.

"I've found something here that I'd never known before—that Jesus loves me . . . enough to give his life for me. I'd never been to church until one of the pantry workers asked me to go with her a year ago. She's so kind and warm. I think she's one of those 'salt of the earth' people. People don't come to this pantry just for the food, but for the love of caring people, and the love of God."

Now one of the workers opened the door and the people began coming in. Carolyn looked at the sacks of groceries, at the workers and the people waiting for food, and at the church building that seemed to wrap loving arms around them all . . . and gave thanks. ■

*The Rev. Barbara Jurgensen is assistant professor at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio. This is the tenth in a series of stories based on the Beatitudes.*



## Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

### ♦ ELCA gives priority to environmental stewardship

Education, advocacy and the creation of earth-care models are the three areas of focus for the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Office of Environmental Stewardship. ELCA congregations and members can play a vital role in global environmental stewardship. For more information, contact Job Ebenezer, director, 800-638-3522 ext. 2708.

*Creator God, make us responsible stewards of all you have made.*

### ♦ Tanzanian Lutherans face conflict

At the center of a controversy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania are members of a splinter group and the administration of the church's Northern Diocese, according to All Africa Press Service. With a membership of 400,000, the Northern Diocese covers Moshi and Mount Meru and its surrounding areas. Mount Meru people have wanted a separate diocese for nearly two decades. Clashes between the groups have claimed lives and resulted in several injuries and loss of property. The government has not intervened to stop the violence.

*God of Truth, help us live out the unity you have established.*

### ♦ ELCA creates policies on abuse and harassment

An ELCA working group is formulating a strategy for use by ELCA synods and congregations on sexual abuse and harassment. The group seeks to have education and increasing awareness be part of the comprehensive outline. The group is conducting workshops and training synod officials, clergy and seminarians.

*Risen Savior, your plan for us does not include abuse of one another. Help us make the church a safe place for all your children.*

### ♦ Palestinian children smile after surgery

An "Operation Smile" campaign at Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem brought American medical staff to work with Palestinian medical leagues to perform surgery on some 150 Palestinian youth with a variety of facial problems. Co-sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation, 150 cases were chosen from more than 300 patients.

*Thank you, God, for the healing you accomplish through medical staff, throughout the world.*

Remember to add to your prayers people and issues in the news.

*Sonia C. Groenewold is senior news editor of The Lutheran.*

## MISSION:

## Growth

**Give thanks to God.** . . . are some of the opening words of the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. Even as this newly formed congregation, made up of Jewish and Gentile converts, struggled for its identity in a hostile environment, Paul found reason to give thanks. His thankfulness came as a result of the grace of God given to them in Christ Jesus (1:4).

Paul knew that God's love and grace expressed in Jesus Christ would be the foundation to sustain his fellow believers as they wrestled with issues of growth and mission. But without a guiding hand, Paul also knew that these very issues could divide the congregation. So Paul writes to strengthen their faith, hope, and love of these first-century Christians.

The 1993 Women of the ELCA Bible study in *Lutheran Woman Today*, titled *Faith, Hope, and Love: A Study of 1 Corinthians*, will explore the conflicts and controversies, joys and sorrows of Paul as he cared for this struggling congregation. The sessions connect 20th-century Christians with the issues that have threatened the body of Christ—in Paul's time and today.

Sessions	1 Corinthians study texts
Striving for Unity	1:1-17
The Surprising Message of the Cross	1:18—2:10
Laying the Foundation	3:5—4:15
The Good News About Death	15:1-19
Lawful or Beneficial?	5:9-13, 6:12-20
Living the Life Assigned	7:1-17, 25-40
All Things Done for Building Up the Church	11:2-16; 14:1-5, 26-40
Do This to Remember Me	11:17-34
Knowledge or Love?	8:1-13; 9:3-23; 10:23—11:1
One Body, Several Parts	12:1-26
The Greatest of These Is Love	13:1-13
Standing Firmly in the Faith	15:1-2, 20-28, 35-58

**Women of Faith, Hope, and Love** is the 1993 Theme Program that includes the Bible study featured in LWT. The biblical texts in **Daily Bible Readings 1993** complement the study and include all of 1 Corinthians. The leader guide, Bible study resource book, theme program and daily Bible readings are available from Augsburg Fortress locations, or by calling 1-800-464-4648 (see p. 31 for order information).

*Karen Battle*

*Director for Educational Resources*

## MISSION:

# Action

## Building Blocks of Hope

*"Rejoice in hope. . . . Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."*

Romans 12:12a, 13,  
New Revised Standard Version

God's gift of hope is present and powerful in our daily lives. We not only rejoice in it and thank God, but we also look for ways to bring God's hope to others, especially to those who do not always feel hopeful.

One way to share this gift is to join with sisters across the country in "building blocks of hope" for women and children living in poverty. During this triennium, and through 1996, a priority for Women of the ELCA is to continue ministry to and with low-income women and children in this country.

### **Individuals and congregational units are already:**

- ✓ reading and learning about poverty in their own communities;
- ✓ conducting education sessions;
- ✓ exploring the Bible for ways to connect faith and actions;
- ✓ offering literacy classes and after-school tutoring;
- ✓ volunteering in homeless shelters, soup kitchens and food pantries;
- ✓ organizing Bread for the World "Offering of Letters" events;

- ✓ adopting and mentoring low-income families;
- ✓ praying for all who need God's hope.

### **What will you do?**

Why not, in your own congregation unit, commit to share God's hope with needy sisters—by intensifying your efforts in a ministry already started, or via new ministries to prevent or eliminate poverty?

This fall every unit received a commitment form in the shape of a child's block on which to note the nature of the unit's commitment. The "building blocks of hope" will be displayed at the 1993 Second Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA. Imagine a block from every unit of Women of the ELCA! Each block will represent the hope you are bringing in your own community. And collectively the blocks will show the powerful impact that Women of the ELCA can have on the lives of low-income women and children.

**For planning helps** and other information write "Building Blocks of Hope," Women of the ELCA, 81 West Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189. ■

*Doris E. Strieter  
Director for Service  
and Development*



## MISSION:

# Community

## Thank God for Small Blessings

*They have so much they  
don't know how to appreciate  
anything."*

These were my mother's words, spoken on a Christmas morning many years ago as we stumbled over a living room full of gifts for my five children from loving relatives and friends. I was offended at what I thought a criticism of my children's wishes, but eventually I came to realize my mother's wisdom.

Although the children uttered polite thank-yous and were genuinely delighted to have so many things, these gifts were taken for granted, all too soon, discarded for some other thing. I thought back to my own childhood, when I was promised that if I was good, I would receive one special gift at Christmas. And I remember how carefully I chose that gift; how I anticipated it and how happy I was when I got my wish. I trusted the promise, I hoped and prayed for the gift and I knew what it was to be thankful.

I somehow wanted my children to share that experience. So, although they still received many gifts, we began a practice of having each of them

choose one special toy for themselves and one to give to a friend. All the other toys and games were put away and given to them as special gifts at different times throughout the year. They were always excited and grateful for their "new" toy and because they had less, what they had became more valuable.

In a society that teaches more is better, that measures who we are by what we own, that promotes buying based on greed rather than need and encourages instant self-gratification, it is difficult to be thankful for what we have—because we are so concerned about what we do not have.

How helpful, then, to remember that "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8, New Revised Standard Version). ■

*Dolores Yancey  
Director for Community and  
Organizational Development*

## Dear sisters in Christ,

It's hard to believe that we are less than a year away from our Second Triennial Convention in Washington, D.C. The excitement is building for the convention and its theme "God's Gift of Hope."

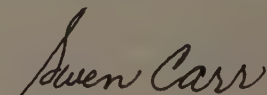
The triennial convention is the highest legislative body of our organization—in which women representing congregational units from all over the United States and the Caribbean will address issues of importance that affect the church, the society and the world. Delegates will set direction for programming and choose leadership for the next three years.

Selecting that leadership is key and takes much thought and prayer. The women who will serve on the churchwide executive board should bring together a variety of gifts, life experiences and cultural backgrounds. These women will spend the next three years, on your behalf, exploring issues affecting women and how this organization will answer the call to service—tasks that carry great opportunity and great responsibility.

It is just as important, however, to remember that the churchwide executive board is made up of a variety of "ordinary women." Some have served in synodical and cluster/conference leadership and some have not. Some are gifted worship or workshop leaders or Bible study facilitators. And some are organizing shelters and after-school care in their congregations. The point is not *how much* they have done but whether they will use their varied gifts toward planning for the future.

Women of the ELCA is calling for suggested nominees for churchwide executive board members. An official letter requesting such nominees, with information on the nomination process, has gone out to each Women of the ELCA congregational unit.

Nominees may be suggested by any of the following: congregational and intercongregational units, delegates to the Second Triennial Convention, and officers and members of the present churchwide executive board. Current members of the churchwide executive board who have served only one three-year term may be re-elected, but they must be nominated again. A nominating committee will select final nominees. Election is set for the Second Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA in Washington D.C., August 7-10, 1993. Contact your unit president for details on the nominations process. Nominee suggestions, on the appropriate form, must be postmarked no later than January 5, 1993. God be with you. See you in D.C. in '93.

  
President

## ers to the editor

*inued from page 1)*

nt to express my concern over I see as a gross omission in the issue on salvation. In spite of very fine articles in this issue, to find any mention whatsoever the central truth of the Christian ing and certainly that of our eran heritage that we are saved race through faith. The most Bible verse of all on this subject, esians 2:8, is never referred to. I find no clear definition or definition or even mention of the im- nance of faith as our response to s grace.

ese comments are intended to gracious response and I hope will be received in the same ner.

*The Rev. Russell Lee  
Albuquerque, New Mexico*

then . . .

g through LWT I noticed there seven articles by men, and four omen. And the Bible study was woman and one man. I feel that e are enough talented writers (ale) and that the magazine ld include more of their writing. d *The Lutheran* monthly and eciate articles by females.

*Ruth Kislingbury  
San Francisco, California*

ther side to April

not putting down or complain- just another side to your beau- April issue. [Regarding "What'sunny About Church?"] I agree e should be joy and laughter in church—it's appropriate. But a my husband died and I was in my grief, I found I was really ated that there were times I l not go to church and feel just

the loving arms of God surrounding me and comforting me when I need- ed it so badly. At that time in my life I found laughter during worship in- appropriate for me and I had to "make myself go to church." It's a touchy situation.

*Carolyn Carlson  
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

## Carrying on

After opening my May LWT and reading the letters, I decided I couldn't stand to be our editor even if I knew how because I couldn't stand what people write each month when you have worked so hard and prayed for God's direction in all you do.

I just have to tell you, I still carry the December LWT with me every day. We had several deaths in No- vember last year and with our be- reavement follow-up at the hospital I included the last two pages of the Bible study. I had wonderful re- sponse. I can't think of a greater time to talk about death when we are cel- ebrating the birthing of the one that makes victory over death possible.

Thanks for carrying on in spite of people.

*Dorothy Halvorson  
Taylor, Wisconsin*

## ◆ HONOR ROLL ◆

Congratulations to:

**Hope;** Columbus, Ohio

**Orient;** Orient, South Dakota.

Honor Roll congregations are those in which all women subscribe to LWT. For more information, write to LWT Promotion, Box 1209, Minne- apolis, MN 55440; Attention: Anita Oachs.



# a prayer for Bugs

Lauri A. Burch

With a specially prepared “bug bottle” in hand, I followed my four-year-old daughter through the jungle of our yard. Diligently turning stones and digging under roots, I searched for tomato bugs, more commonly known as “roly-polies.” It was show-and-tell day at preschool and something squiggly was the “in” thing to bring.

My daughter’s eyes lit up as she turned a rock over. “Mom, hundreds and millions of them!” I peeked over her shoulder for a peek. Sure enough, there was a nest of squirming and writhing bugs. My daughter did a triple somersault. I put on my best mommy’s scared face.

“I’ll let you have the fun of picking them up and putting them into the jar,” I said, trying to sound excited. Squawking with delight, she carefully placed each creature in her jar. Her cheeks were covered with grime, and there was plenty of dirt under her nails, but her little treasures were safe.

On the way to school, my daughter noticed something terrible. “They’re getting out! One’s on the floor of the van and one is crawling up the baby’s car seat!”

I tried not to let the panic show in my voice. “How are they getting out?”

A big tear started to roll down her cheek. “They’re squeezing out the air holes.”

I tried to remain calm, but I could tell she was worried about her wayward bugs. “Put your hands over the hole and I’ll fix it when we get to school.”


Screeching to a halt in front of the school, we both jumped out of the van. I hoisted the baby out and seized the bug bottle. We ran to the classroom, borrowed tape from the teacher, and taped the air holes shut.

A worried frown creased my daughter’s brow. “But how are they going to breathe, mommy?”



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